In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

HELLFIRE: A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, seek His help and His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evils of our souls and the wickedness of our deeds. Whoever Allah guides, none can misguide; and whoever He leaves astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone, with no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

> *"O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and do not die except as Muslims." (Aal Imran: 102)*
>
> *"O mankind! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them spread many men and women. And fear Allah through Whom you demand your mutual rights, and (do not cut) the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is Ever-Watchful over you." (An-Nisa: 1)*
>
> *"O you who believe! Fear Allah and speak a word of truth. He will direct you to righteous deeds and will forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed achieved a great achievement." (Al-Ahzab: 70-71)*

1. In the Beginning: Paradise Was the Aspiration

When I was at the beginning of the path — the path of Islam — and this was, praise be to Allah, in the early stages of my youth, I used to believe that Paradise was the place to which my ambitions should be directed. Perhaps I was even overcome by the feeling — not just hope — that I was deserving of it! I thought that the matter of the Fire, and thinking about being saved from it, was beyond the concern of someone like me. Someone like me was not among its people — if Allah willed — and would not enter it. Therefore, he was free from the need to fear it or to seek refuge in Allah from it. And if he supplicated to Allah for salvation from it, that was only in emulation of the Prophet (peace be upon him) who would supplicate for salvation from the Fire, even though it was certain that he was not among its people.

I was often overcome by a feeling when seeking forgiveness that I had not done what warranted lengthy remorse or profound grief, for I had been guided by Allah to abandon any sin I had fallen into, and to apologize for it — and this was sufficient in the matter of repentance!

This assumption continued with me through a phase of my religious life. But then, when I began to understand the Quran deeply, came to know the true meaning of faith and the true meaning of sin, and studied the morals of the Prophets, the righteous, and the people of faith — this feeling began to fade gradually. The foremost and primary concern became thinking about how to be saved from the Fire and to flee from the horrors that precede it. As for Paradise — all of Paradise, especially the highest level of Firdaws — that requires a different accounting and a different striving. I saw that my

ambition, resolve, and deeds fell far short of it. And the sins I had committed and the transgressions I had engaged in — no amount of weeping from this day until death would suffice for them. And if the mercy of Allah did not reach me with forgiveness, I would be among the losers. So how did I come to this realization?

2. Understanding the Concept of Sin

A number of things came together that made me revisit my previous calculations and look at the matter from a new perspective. The first thing that awakened my sense of the error in my previous conception of Paradise and the Fire — when I was at the beginning of the path — was my realization of the meaning of sin, and that disobeying Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, is a grave matter. One of the things that ignited this understanding within me was a statement by one of the righteous: "Do not look at the smallness of the sin, but look at Whom you have disobeyed!"

I found the confirmation of this in the attributes of perfection with which Allah describes Himself, and in His favors and blessings upon His servants. His right upon His servants — Glorified and Exalted be He — is that they fear Him as He deserves to be feared, that they obey Him and not disobey Him, that they thank Him and not be ungrateful to Him, and that they remember Him and not forget Him. Who is able to fulfill this fully? I found that Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, warns His servants of His punishment and that He holds them accountable for sins, both small and large. I became certain that the right of Allah upon His servants is far greater and more important than anything He commands them to do, and that all are under His mercy and subject to His command, and that He — Glorified be He — "none can punish as He will punish on that Day, and none can bind as He will bind."

3. Why Was Sin a Grave Matter?

Sin is in itself a grave matter because it is a violation of the command of the Lord — Allah — besides Whom there is no god, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and everything that exists. He is the Lord of all things and their Master; everything has submitted to Him and humbled itself before Him. He is the Dominant over His servants, the All-Wise, the All-Aware, from Whom nothing of the affairs of His servants is hidden — whether great or small. He is the One who watches over every soul for what it earns; not even the weight of an atom escapes Him in the heavens or the earth. The mighty and noble angels fear Him with awe and dread. The heavens nearly split asunder from above them out of their awe of Him.

He is the One who holds the heavens and the earth lest they cease. No creature can encompass any knowledge of Him, while He encompasses all knowledge of His creation; not even the fleeting thoughts of their hearts, the stirrings of their souls, or the whisperings of their chests escape Him. His knowledge and mercy encompass all things. He accepts nothing from any of His creation except submission to Him and surrender to His command.

He honors whom He wills among His creation and servants — with no limit to their honor and no end to His giving. And He humbles whom He wills — with no equal to that humiliation. He punishes whom He wills among His servants with punishment that has

no end and no parallel: "none can punish as He will punish on that Day, and none can bind as He will bind."

He is the Lord Allah who made all of creation for Him and all authority belongs to Him. None can create except Him, and nothing else can create even a particle, a grain, or a fly. He alone owns the benefit and harm of His creation — none of His creation can bring about benefit or harm for themselves except by His will. He is the Lord Allah, Creator of the heavens and the earth, whose creation and preservation of the heavens and the earth does not weary or burden Him.

Who other than Him could place the sun in its orbit? Who other than Him could set the moon in its place? The stars in their paths, the galaxies in their courses? Who has perfected all of this? Allah the Almighty says: "Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving." (Fatir: 41)

He is the Sovereign of all dominion, the Administrator of the entire universe — no one helped or assisted Him in creating the universe, nor in preserving it. He alone is the Creator of all that exists in the universe, its Preserver, and its Sustainer. He is the One who will unravel the fabric of this universe whenever He wills, and transform the heavens and the earth whenever He desires. Allah the Almighty says: "When the sky breaks apart, and when the stars fall, scattering, and when the seas are erupted, and when the graves are scattered — a soul will know what it has put forth and kept back." (Al-Infitar: 1-5)

4. The Right of Allah upon His Servants Is Greater than Everything He Commands Them

Furthermore, what makes violating the command of Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, a grave matter and a major sin is that the right of Allah upon His servants is greater than what He commands them to do. For Allah is the Creator of all creation, the Administrator of their affairs, and the One who has blessed them with the gift of existence in the first place. Every blessing comes only from Him — Glorified and Exalted be He. He alone is the Provider of all His servants; He is their Lord who watches over them, takes care of them, and nurtures them with His mercy. They have no Lord other than Him and no god besides Him.

And even when He commands His servants with what He commands, that is His right over them — for He created them, is their Lord, and brought them into existence from nothing. Yet despite that, He does not burden any soul beyond its capacity and does not command His servants except with what benefits them. When He commands them, He does so while being in no need of them — their worship does not benefit Him in any way. In fact, the worship of servants to Him is itself part of the grace He bestows upon them, because it is the means of their purification and righteousness, and the means of attaining His pleasure, mercy, and reward. Thus the sin of the sinner becomes something great and a major transgression — because he opposes the Lord Allah who has been gracious and generous, who created and provided, and who has shown compassion to His servant!

5. The Religion That Allah Will Not Accept Other Than Is Islam

The religion that Allah will not accept other than from His servants is Islam, whose meaning is submission to Allah by affirming His news and implementing His command. Allah the Almighty says: "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam." And He says: "And whoever desires other than Islam as religion — never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers."

Islam is the religion with which Allah is pleased for His servants: "and have approved for you Islam as religion." It is the religion of His angels and every willing, obedient creation. Allah says: "They fear their Lord above them and do what they are commanded." It is the religion of the heavens and the earth: "Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, 'Come willingly or by compulsion.' They said, 'We have come willingly.'"

6. Denying the Message Is Disbelief, and Rejecting the Command Is Disbelief

Whoever rejects any statement of Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, or disbelieves in anything from the unseen that He has informed us of, has committed disbelief. Likewise, whoever rejects the command of Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, and refuses to obey it out of arrogance and stubbornness has committed disbelief.

The first sin by which Iblis disobeyed his Lord was of the second type — namely, rejecting the command. For Allah had commanded him to prostrate before Adam, and he said: "I am not one to prostrate before a human being whom You created from clay." Iblis — may Allah curse him — was not one who denied any of the reports of Allah. His sin was confined entirely to rejecting the command — out of arrogance and pride — when he believed that this command contradicted wisdom, claiming that the superior should not prostrate before the inferior, since he, created from fire, was superior to Adam, who was created from clay. But the analogy of Iblis was flawed.

When Iblis persisted in his disobedience, his punishment was that Allah cursed him forever and expelled him from His mercy eternally. The sin of Iblis was thus a refusal and a rejection of the divine command, and it was for that reason that Iblis committed disbelief, was cursed, and was expelled from the mercy of Allah.

The second sin — the disobedience against Allah — was committed by Adam (peace be upon him). But it was not out of stubbornness. Rather, it was weakness and forgetfulness, as Allah says: 'And We had already taken a covenant from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.' Then Adam did not persist in that sin; he hastened to flee from it and seek forgiveness for it. He said: 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.' When Adam and his wife admitted their transgression and hastened to repent and turn back, Allah accepted their excuse and pardoned their slip.

7. Servitude to Allah Means Obeying His Command — Whether Its Wisdom Is Understood or Not

Servitude to Allah consists of obeying His command, whatever that command may be — whether small or large, whether it agrees with the reasoning of the commanded person or contradicts it. For the Lord Allah — Glorified and Exalted be He — knows best what He commands and prohibits. A servant is not truly a servant unless he obeys his Master without hesitation, delay, reflection, or questions such as "Why did He command this?" or "Why did He forbid that?" If a servant only obeys what he understands and comprehends, then his obedience is to his own understanding and reasoning, not to his Creator, God, and Master.

A person obeys his mind and heart even in the hardest things upon his self and body — indeed, he may ride the difficult and the easy in executing what the authority of his mind, heart, or desire commands him. If obedience to Allah were subject to the authority of the mind, heart, and desire, then what is truly worshipped would be the mind, heart, and desire — not Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He.

True servitude is that the servant obeys his Lord even in what contradicts the authority of his mind, heart, and desire. Indeed, religion is built upon opposing what the soul desires and what contradicts a person's own opinion and reasoning. This is the meaning of worship for Allah. This does not prevent religion from sometimes containing what agrees with the reasoning and view of a person — but Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, has willed that His servants worship Him according to what He, Glorified and Exalted be He, decrees — not according to what they themselves see fit, what their minds comprehend, or what their souls desire.

8. Ibrahim (Peace Be Upon Him): The Imam, the Example, and the Model in Hastening to Fulfill the Command of Allah

This is the Prophet of Allah, Ibrahim, whom Allah made an imam for all people and placed prophethood in his lineage rather than any other human beings. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) did not reach the station of leadership in religion except by being tested by divine commands that contradicted human reasoning — and he fulfilled them in the manner Allah commanded him. Allah says: 'And when his Lord tried Ibrahim with commands, and he fulfilled them, He said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people."' (Al-Baqarah: 124)

Among the things he was commanded with that contradict human reasoning was leaving his wife Hajar and his infant son Ismail in a desolate, uninhabited land — the land of Makkah — with no one around them at all and nothing with them except a bag of dates and a water skin. Then he turned back alone toward the land of Sham.

This divine command to Ibrahim (peace be upon him) contradicted human reasoning — for if anyone had done such a thing on his own accord, it would have been considered a crime and a sin!

Likewise, Allah commanded him to slaughter his firstborn son Ismail (peace be upon him) after he had grown into manhood. Ibrahim hastened to execute the command without hesitation, deliberation, or delay. Had a person intended to kill his son without a command from Allah, it would have been considered a crime and a sin.

9. The Element of Worship in Islam Is Very Great

While the Law revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) in general accords with the reasoning of people of intellect, wisdom, and discernment — the element of worship within it is very great. The times of prayer, the number of rak'ahs, the postures of prayer, the fact that Zakah is due on some wealth but not all of it, the specific amounts, the manner of fasting, and the rites of Hajj — such as the circumambulation, the walking between Safa and Marwah, the kissing of the Black Stone, the standing at Arafat, the overnight stay at Muzdalifah, and the casting of pebbles — all of these are acts of worship intended to test the obedience of servants to their Lord and Creator.

Likewise, the prescribed penalties and punishments — the essence of the matter is worship of Allah by executing His command and refraining from what He has forbidden. The same applies to what Allah has permitted and what He has prohibited. Allah permitted trade and prohibited usury — and a seller may earn a thousand percent in his trade, while the forbidden usury might be only a dirham per thousand — yet usury remains forbidden and trade remains permissible. A woman is commanded not to mourn for a deceased person more than three days, even if the deceased is the most beloved person to her — her son, brother, or father — yet she must mourn for her husband for four months and ten days!

10. The Comprehensive Concept of the Meaning of Sin

When a servant truly knows his Lord — that He is his Creator and Provider, the One who manages his affairs, in Whose hand lies his benefit and harm, Who knows his public and private matters, his life and death, and that the servant cannot be independent of Him for the blink of an eye — he knows that the right of Allah upon His servants is that they obey Him and not disobey Him, that they thank Him and not be ungrateful to Him, that they remember Him and not forget Him, and that they fear Him as He truly deserves to be feared.

Every shortcoming in these rights is a shortcoming and a sin. Heedlessness — even for one moment — from the remembrance of Allah is a sin. Failure to give thanks for even one of the countless blessings of Allah is a sin. Disobeying Allah's command in a great or small matter is a sin.

11. Being Held Accountable for Sin

Every person who disobeys Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, is subject to accountability, unless Allah forgives his sin. The believer may be held accountable for his sin in this world through trials that purify his sins and elevate his rank. Allah may even hold some of His prophets accountable in this world for a minor sin committed by them.

Adam (peace be upon him) — whose sin was nothing more than violating the divine command by eating from the tree from which Allah had forbidden him — experienced a long period of suffering as a result. The effects of his sin included his expulsion from Paradise and his and his offspring's exposure to the tribulations of this world until the Day of Resurrection!

Noah (peace be upon him) — whom Allah named a grateful servant, and who was among the Messengers of firm resolve — endured a thousand years less fifty of worship and the prolonged anguish of his burden. When he supplicated to his Lord saying: 'My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges.' — Allah responded: 'O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is of unrighteous conduct. So do not ask Me about that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant.'

Yunus (peace be upon him) was punished by Allah because he left his people — who had denied him and harmed him — without Allah's permission. He was thus imprisoned in the belly of the whale until the mercy of Allah reached him, and he emerged weak and ill. Allah says: 'And had he not been of those who exalt Allah, he would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected.' (As-Saffat: 143-144)

12. The Prophets Fear Sins That One of Us Would Count Among Acts of Obedience

The Prophets (peace be upon them) fear sins that — if they were committed by any of us — we would count among acts of obedience and drawing near to Allah. Which of us would not wish that he had done what Ibrahim (peace be upon him) did — lying to his people, the idol-worshippers — when he said: "Indeed, I am ill," and when he said: "Rather, this, the largest of them, did it" — in order to destroy their idols and bring them back to their reason and guidance? Who among us would not wish to say about his wife "she is my sister," in order to save her and himself from a disbelieving tyrant who wished to kill him and seize his wife? And yet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) says on the Day of Resurrection, apologizing for taking the foremost position in intercession, fearing his own sin: "I have told three lies." (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

13. Fear of Allah Increases with Increase in Faith, and Decreases with Decrease in Faith

The more one's feelings become numb and the farther one moves from the source of light, the more the sense of sin disappears. The disbelievers commit disbelief, crimes, and transgressions while laughing. The wicked and the hypocrite views his sin as a fly that landed on his nose — he could dismiss it with a wave of his hand. But the believer views his sin as a mountain that is about to fall upon him. Anas ibn Malik used to say — and he had lived long after the Prophet (peace be upon him): "You are doing deeds that in your own eyes are less than a hair, yet we used to consider them, at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), to be among the major sins."

14. Types and Varieties of Punishments for Sinful Believers

Every sin is subject to reckoning unless Allah forgives it. Allah says: "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it." (Az-Zalzalah: 7-8)

Some of the monotheistic sinners may be punished in the Fire, in the grave, or during the gathering — for minor sins that some people consider small. A woman was seen by

the Prophet in the Fire for a cat she had confined until it died of hunger. A man who was killed fighting alongside the Messenger and whom the companions thought was a martyr — the Prophet said: "No, I saw him in the Fire, wearing a cloak he had stolen from the war spoils." And that cloak was not even worth four dirhams!

A man speaks a word that angers Allah — giving it no importance — yet it causes him to plunge into the Fire for seventy autumns. Many women from the people of monotheism enter the Fire because they curse excessively and are ungrateful to their husbands.

15. The Condition of the Believer Between Fear and Hope

I used to hear repeatedly, in the early stages of learning, that the believer must be between fear and hope — fearing punishment and hoping for Allah's mercy, forgiveness, and grace in Paradise. The verses and hadiths about promise and warning would ring in my ears — as they did for many students of religious knowledge. Yet, like many people, I allowed hope to prevail over fear, and desire over awe! Then I finally discovered that this was a form of deception! And I came to know with certainty after that: fear comes first and continues forever. One who does not truly fear Allah is outside the very definition of faith.

I reached this conclusion after coming to know with certainty that all the people of faith fear — the angels, who are the best of Allah's servants, fear disobeying Allah; the Prophets, who are the elite of Allah, were in constant fear of Allah's punishment; and the best of the people of faith were in constant fear and dread of punishment. There is no security for the believer until after he enters Paradise and Allah says to its people: "I have made My pleasure descend upon you, so I will never be displeased with you afterward." Before that — no.

16. The Angels of Allah Fear Punishment

Allah has described the angels as being in complete obedience. He says: "Indeed, those near your Lord are not prevented by arrogance from His worship, and they exalt Him, and to Him they prostrate." (Al-A'raf: 206). And of the most powerful of the angels — the angels of punishment — He says they "do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded." (At-Tahrim: 6)

Despite this, they are in constant fear of Allah and perpetual caution against disobeying Him, filled with awe and dread since the time Allah created the Fire. Allah says: "They fear their Lord above them and do what they are commanded." (An-Nahl: 50)

The Quran carries a warning and threat of Hellfire against the angels themselves if they disobey. And Iblis — who was once worshipping Allah alongside the highest angels — when he disobeyed his Lord and refused to prostrate before Adam, his fate became what Allah narrated to us in the Quran. His punishment was eternal curse and everlasting Fire. The sin of Iblis was pride, stubbornness, and persistence in opposing his Lord. He ruined his entire past of worship with a single act of disobedience he persisted in.

17. The Prophets and Messengers of Allah Fear Punishment

As for the Prophets and Messengers — they are the greatest of human beings in fearing Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, in dread of His punishment, and in fleeing to Him — despite the level of obedience, uprightness, and worship they maintained!

Adam (peace be upon him), ever since he disobeyed Allah by eating from the tree from which Allah had forbidden him, has been in fear of punishment — despite his seeking forgiveness and his return to Allah from his sin, and despite what came after that of the tribulation of being expelled from Paradise and enduring life on the surface of the earth.

When his children on the Day of Resurrection come to seek his intercession with Allah for the judgment between servants and the entrance to Paradise, saying: "O Adam, you are the father of humanity, Allah created you with His own hand, made His angels prostrate to you, and taught you the names of all things — will you not intercede for us with Allah?" He will reply: "Is it not my father's sin that expelled you from Paradise? Go to someone else."

In the lengthy hadith of intercession, every messenger remains in fear of Allah. On the Day of Resurrection, each prophet says — when people come seeking his intercession — "My Lord's anger today is of such intensity the like of which has never occurred before and will never occur after. And I have... [mentions his concern]... myself, myself, myself. Go to someone else."

18. True Believers Are in Constant Fear of Allah's Punishment Until They Enter Paradise

When I read the Quran, I found that Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, describes His believing servants as being in constant fear of His punishment, in perpetual apprehension that punishment might befall them at any moment, and in ongoing dread of what they are moving toward.

I found Allah saying in the description of His believing servants: "And those who are fearful of the punishment of their Lord — indeed, the punishment of their Lord is not that from which one is safe." (Al-Ma'arij: 27-28). And I found Allah saying in the description of His believing servants: "Indeed, those who are fearful from awe of their Lord, and those who believe in the signs of their Lord, and those who do not associate anything with their Lord, and those who give what they give while their hearts are fearful because they will be returning to their Lord — it is those who hasten to good deeds, and they outstrip others therein." (Al-Mu'minun: 57-61)

These believers fear — even though they pray, fast, and give charity. In the Musnad of Imam Ahmad, the Mother of the Believers Aisha asked: "O Messenger of Allah, 'those who give what they give while their hearts are fearful' — is that the one who steals, commits adultery, drinks alcohol, and fears Allah?" He said: "No, O daughter of As-Siddiq. Rather, it is the one who prays, fasts, and gives charity, while fearing Allah."

19. Remarkable Examples of Believers Who Feared the Punishment of Allah

Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) — every believer wishes he had some of his deeds — said on his deathbed, regarding his long history in Islam and all his righteous deeds: 'I wish that this would be even — neither for me nor against me.' And: 'By Allah, if I had gold equal to the earth's entire surface, I would ransom myself with it from the punishment of Allah before I see it.'

Amr ibn Al-As (may Allah be pleased with him) wept on his deathbed, fearing the meeting with Allah. His son kept reminding him of the good news the Prophet had given him. But Amr said: "The best of what we can count on is the testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. I have passed through three stages in my life..." And at the end he said: "When you bury me, cover me with soil gradually... and stay around my grave for the time it takes to slaughter a camel and divide its meat, so that I may find comfort in your presence while I see what the messengers of my Lord will bring me."

Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), when asked about the verse 'Then We caused to inherit the Book those We have chosen of Our servants; and among them is he who wrongs himself, and among them is he who is moderate, and among them is he who is foremost in good deeds' — she said: 'The foremost in good deeds are those who remained during the time of the Messenger of Allah and received his testimony of Paradise. The moderate are those who followed in their footsteps until they joined them. And the one who wrongs himself — that is like me and like you!'

20. A Tour of Hellfire Dispels Arrogance

What most effectively caused my previous arrogance about Paradise to fade and disappear — directing all thinking toward salvation from the Fire first and foremost — was a tour of the Fire from the inside, a look into its deep abyss, and a clear vision of those who enter it and fall into it.

When I stood repeatedly before the description of Allah and His Messenger of this great Fire that exists now, and examined with the heart the conditions of its people — I knew with certainty — by the will of Allah — that all resolve, the entirety of resolve, must be directed to fleeing from it. And fleeing from the Fire must precede thinking about entering Paradise. It is known that warding off harms takes precedence over seeking benefits. How much more so when the benefit can only be attained by first warding off the harm — for Paradise is only attained after salvation from the Fire!

And I knew that for someone like me — who carries this long chain of sins and transgressions that deserve punishment, were it not for the mercy of Allah — it would be poor manners and transgression in supplication to ask Allah for Paradise while he has not yet freed himself from the causes of punishment.

21. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) Speaks About the Fire He Saw with His Own Eyes

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) stood at the gate of the Fire and looked into it. He said: "I looked into Paradise and saw that most of its people were the poor.

And I looked into the Fire and saw that most of its people were women." (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

He also said: "I stood at the gate of Paradise, and the majority of those who entered it were the poor. The people of wealth were detained — except that the people of the Fire had been ordered to the Fire. And I stood at the gate of the Fire, and the majority of those who entered it were women." (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

In the Musnad of Imam Ahmad, from Jabir ibn Abdullah Al-Ansari: "The sun was eclipsed during the time of the Messenger of Allah on an intensely hot day. The Messenger of Allah prayed with his companions and prolonged the standing until they began to collapse. Then he bowed and prolonged the bowing. Then he raised his head and prolonged it... And it was presented to me that I began to step back in fear that it would engulf you. And I saw a woman being tormented for a cat she had tied up, not feeding it nor letting it eat from the insects of the earth. And I saw Abu Thuamah Amr ibn Malik dragging his intestines in the Fire. These are two of the signs of Allah — when you see an eclipse, pray until it passes." (Reported by Ahmad)

22. Abdullah ibn Umar ibn Al-Khattab Sees the Fire in a Dream

Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) used to wish to see a vision to tell the Prophet about it, as many of the companions used to do. In the two Sahihs: "I saw in a dream that two angels came to me, each holding an iron rod in his hand. They said: 'Do not be afraid — you are an excellent man, if only you would pray more at night!' They took me and brought me to the edge of Hellfire. There it was, folded like the folding of a well, with posts like the posts of a well. Between each two posts there was an angel holding an iron rod. And in it were men suspended by chains, their heads downward. I recognized some men from Quraysh..."

23. This Is the Description of the Fire in the Quran and Sunnah

As for me, the writer of these lines — I have not seen the Fire of the Hereafter, neither in wakefulness nor in sleep. But I have read and heard its descriptions in the Noble Quran and the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

I try to be like that companion who would sit in the gatherings of the Prophet and hear him describe and portray the Fire and its terrors and the conditions of its people — as though he and it were face to face. I began to gather the description of the Fire from the verses of the Book of Allah and the scenes that Allah portrays for us in the eloquent and miraculous Quran, along with other scenes that the Prophet conveys and portrays for us in his comprehensive words. The overall picture is terrifying, terrifying — and every individual scene cuts the heart, if only it would pay attention and listen.

24. The Fire Is One of the Greatest Signs of Allah

Allah the Almighty says: "No! By the moon, and by the night when it departs, and by the morning when it brightens — indeed, it is one of the greatest things, a warning to humanity — to whoever wills among you to proceed or stay behind." (Al-Muddathir: 32-37)

And He says: "And say, 'The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills — let him believe; and whoever wills — let him disbelieve.' Indeed, We have prepared for the wrongdoers a fire whose walls will surround them. And if they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like murky oil, which scalds the faces. Wretched is the drink, and evil is the resting place." (Al-Kahf: 29)

And I say to the one who does not believe in Hell: By Allah, it is true. It exists right now. The truthful ones have seen it with their own eyes and have described what they witnessed. The greatest of those who saw it and spoke about what is in it was our truthful and trustworthy Messenger, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the unlettered Prophet and Messenger (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him). He said: "I stood at the gate of the Fire!" And he said: "I saw the Fire — and I have never seen anything more terrible!"

25. Hellfire Exists and Will Remain Forever

Hellfire exists — it has been created and is present right now. The Prophet (peace be upon him) saw it with his own eyes. He informed us that when Allah created Paradise, He called Jibreel and said: "Go and look at it and at what I have prepared for its people." Jibreel went and looked at it and what Allah had prepared for its people. He returned and said: "By Your Glory, no one who hears about it would fail to enter it!" Then Allah commanded Paradise to be surrounded with hardships. Then He said: "Go back and look at it and what I have prepared for its people." Jibreel looked and returned saying: "By Your Glory, I fear that no one will enter it!" Then He sent Jibreel to the Fire: "Go and look at it and what I have prepared for its people." Jibreel looked at it — it was turbulent, crashing into itself. He returned and said: "By Your Glory, no one who hears about it would enter it!" Then it was surrounded with desires. Then He said: "Go back and look at what I have prepared for its people." Jibreel went, looked, and returned saying: "By Your Glory, I fear that none will be saved from it!" (Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, and An-Nasa'i)

26. Can the Extent of the Fire Be Imagined?

This created, existing Fire — the mind cannot grasp its vastness. The sun, moon, and stars are small stones within it. It is a tremendous conflagration into which stars and suns are cast like small pebbles thrown into a great well. The bodies of its inhabitants will expand to enormous sizes — the molar tooth of one of them will be like Mount Uhud! The distance between his shoulders will be a journey of three days! The thickness of his skin will be a journey of three days! The body of one of the Fire's inhabitants will be like the greatest mountain in this world. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The molar tooth — or the canine — of the disbeliever will be like Uhud, and the thickness of his skin will be a journey of three days." (Reported by Muslim)

In Al-Bukhari, the Prophet said: "The distance between the shoulders of the disbeliever is a journey of three days for a fast rider."

Despite the fact that from Adam's children, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand will enter the Fire — and only one out of every thousand will enter Paradise — and despite the equal numbers of disbelieving jinn and more, all of them entering the

Fire in the condition Allah described — all of these will not fill the Fire and it will not be cramped with them! "On the Day We will say to Hell, 'Have you been filled?' and it will say, 'Are there more?'" (Qaf: 30)

27. In the Fire, All Causes of Death Exist — Yet There Is No Death!

This great Fire — those who enter it as its permanent inhabitants (we seek refuge in Allah) — are given the news of eternal, unending stay even before being cast into it: "Enter the gates of Hell to abide eternally therein, and wretched is the residence of the arrogant." (Az-Zumar: 72). All causes of death gather for each of them, yet he does not die from any one of these causes nor from all of them combined: "And death will come to him from every side, yet he will not die; and before him is a massive punishment." (Ibrahim: 17)

The heat of its fire would kill and bring death in an instant — yet Allah has written for its people that they taste it without dying. Similarly, its water that cuts through intestines would kill — were it not that Allah has written eternal existence for its people. The same applies to the bites of its serpents, the eating of its Zaqqum tree, the blows of its angels, and their striking its inhabitants with iron hammers — a single blow from which would reduce the greatest mountain on earth to dust and make it crumbling sand. Then the severe anguish that explodes the heart and the intense despair that severs all hope — all of these are fatal, deadly conditions. Yet the one being tormented in the Fire (we seek refuge in Allah) does not die from any single one of them nor from all of them combined.

28. The Punishment of the Fire Increases Forever

This intensification of punishment continues forever, with no hope of a day of rest, not an hour of tranquility, and no cessation of torment. "And those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, 'Supplicate your Lord to lighten for us a day from the punishment.' They will say, 'Did there not come to you your messengers with clear proofs?' They will say, 'Yes.' They will reply, 'Then supplicate yourselves, but the supplication of the disbelievers is not except in error.'" (Al-Mu'min: 49-50)

And Allah says: "Indeed, the criminals will be in the punishment of Hell, abiding eternally. It will not be lightened for them, and they will be in despair therein." (Az-Zukhruf: 74-75) — meaning bewildered, in despair, all hope and expectation of any form of mercy cut off from them.

29. The Food and Drink of the Fire's People Are Torment

The permanent inhabitants of the Fire — we seek refuge in Allah — eat and drink therein, but what they eat and drink is torment like the torment of the Fire or more severe. Despite being tormented by the food they eat and the drink they consume, the necessity of hunger and thirst drives them to this eating and drinking — which is itself a form of torment, indeed it is the torment.

The one being tortured in the Fire suffers intense hunger, and his need and pain drive him to eat from the Zaqqum tree. This tree grows at the bottom of the Fire in the depth

of the pit and the lowest part of the Hellfire, and its branches and fruits emerge in a terrifying, repugnant, and hideous form.

What do you imagine the fruits of a tree that grows in fire, is nourished by fire, and has boiling fluid running through its veins would be? Allah — Glorified and Exalted be He — described the Zaqqum tree and said: "Indeed, it is a tree that grows from the bottom of Hellfire, and its emerging fruit is as if it were heads of devils. And indeed, they will eat from it and fill their bellies with it. Then on top of it they will have a mixture of scalding water. Then indeed, their return will be to the Hellfire." (As-Saffat: 64-68)

30. Other Types of Vile Drinks

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "O you who believe, fear Allah as He should be feared, and do not die except as Muslims. If a single drop of Zaqqum were to drip and land in this world, it would destroy the livelihood of all the earth's inhabitants. So what about those whose only food is Zaqqum?" (Reported by Ahmad)

Allah says about the companions of the Fire (we seek refuge in Allah): "Indeed, the tree of Zaqqum is the food of the sinful. Like murky oil, it boils within bellies like the boiling of scalding water. Take him and drag him into the midst of Hellfire, then pour over his head from the torment of scalding water." (Ad-Dukhan: 43-48)

31. Psychological Torment Is More Severe Than Physical Torment

The torment of the Fire's people is not only physical — where they are punished with fire that chars their skins, then immediately regenerates, and burns their chests until it reaches their hearts. Allah says: "The fire of Allah, kindled, which mounts directed at the hearts." (Al-Humazah: 6-7)

In addition to physical torment, their psychological torment is similar and worse. Among it: constant reprimand from the keepers of the Fire, such as their saying to them: "Did there not come to you your messengers with clear proofs?" And the angels' indifference to their cries for help and screams, or their increasing the punishment whenever they plead. Allah says: "If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like murky oil, which scalds the faces."

When the grief of the Fire's people reaches its peak and overwhelms them, they ask Malik, the keeper of the Fire — the most severe and harsh of all the punishment angels: "O Malik, let your Lord put an end to us!" He replies — after a thousand years (which is one day of the Hereafter): "Indeed, you will remain." (Ad-Dukhan: 77)

And when grief reaches its limit, they turn their blame upon themselves: "And they will say, 'If only we had been listening or reasoning, we would not be among the companions of the Blaze.'" (Al-Mulk: 10). This is an admission of guilt — that they did not have ears to hear the call of Truth in this world, nor minds to comprehend the invitation of Truth that came to them on the tongues of the Messengers!

32. The Greatest Torment of the Fire Is Eternity!

The inhabitants of the Fire are of two types: those eternally abiding — with no end and no death — and they are in levels within it. The highest among them is one placed in a pit in the lowest part of the Fire — if this pit were opened, Hellfire itself would seek refuge in Allah from its heat! The lowest in punishment is one whose only punishment is two embers placed beneath the soles of his feet, from which his brain boils. Yet even this person — who is the least tormented of the Fire's inhabitants — believes and feels himself to be the most tormented person of all.

Imagining eternity in torment surpasses description. Imagine that a person is in a prison — even if it were like the prisons of this world — living in it for infinity, never leaving, neither by death nor by anything else. This imagining alone is enough to kill a person with grief, sorrow, and depression. So what if this prison's walls, gates, food, and drink were all fire? What if it were a pit into which the one being tormented was thrown and fell headfirst for seventy years without reaching the bottom?

33. Who Are the Sinful Believers?

A believer who dies upon faith — if he had committed a sin less than disbelief and polytheism that would remove him from the fold of Islam — has two possibilities: either he had repented from his sin during his lifetime, or he died without repenting. If he had repented from it with sincere repentance that Allah accepted, then he returns as though he had no sin, and this sin will not be held against him in the Hereafter.

If he died without repenting from his sin, then this has various possibilities: Allah may overlook it out of His grace, favor, and mercy. Or he may have many good deeds that outweigh these bad deeds, and Allah forgives him for his bad deeds due to the abundance of good he possesses. Or Allah may will his punishment — and this punishment is either served in the grave, or in the gathering on the Day of Resurrection, or in Hellfire — then the mercy of Allah overtakes him and he is directed to Paradise, given that he died upon monotheism and faith and was not among those who disbelieved in a way that removes them from the Islamic fold.

34. Sin and Its Consequences Are Certain; Repentance and Forgiveness Are Probable

I found that the occurrence of sin from the servant is certain — whether the servant is aware of it or not, whether he counted it as a sin or not, whether he remembers it or has forgotten it. Every sin that occurred on earth is recorded and written — unless Allah erases it through repentance.

I found that the punishment Allah has attached to sin is likewise certain — unless Allah forgives the one who committed the sin. Since the sins I committed are something definite — they have been written and recorded without a doubt — and the divine warning regarding sin is definite (for Allah speaks nothing but truth and threatens nothing but in truth) — unless the servant repents with sincere repentance and Allah forgives him. But acceptance of repentance remains probable. How do I — or anyone else — know that Allah has accepted my excuse, pardoned my slip, and forgiven my sin? I think well of Allah — by the will of Allah — but I think poorly of myself. Have I

completed all the pillars of repentance? Have I abandoned every sin with the determination of one who has no intention of returning to it ever?

35. The Path of the People of Faith to Paradise Is Long — Let Them Prepare for It

I looked at the path of the believer to Paradise and saw that sinners like myself face a long road, a path fraught with dangers, great wildernesses, obstacles upon obstacles. Among the sinful believers are those who are cut off from Paradise and remain in the Fire for as long as Allah wills — then they enter Paradise only after being burned, and new flesh grows for them!

As for the path of the disbelievers to the Fire — it is very short. The grave is the first of its stops. Allah says about the people of Noah: "Because of their sins they were drowned and put into the Fire." (Nuh: 25) — with the letter "Fa" (immediately).

36. Death Is Certainly Coming

From this moment to death is a portion of life that might be an instant, or might extend for years! The average lifespan of the Ummah of Muhammad is between sixty and seventy, and very few exceed this.

I today — the writer of these lines — have passed sixty lunar years. So I have reached the full measure of life, and I am today in extra time...

From this moment to the moment of farewell, no one knows what the ending will be. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "A man may perform the deeds of the people of Paradise until there is only a forearm's length between him and it — then what has been written overtakes him and he performs the deeds of the people of the Fire and enters it. And a man may perform the deeds of the people of the Fire until there is only a forearm's length between him and it — then what has been written overtakes him and he performs the deeds of the people of Paradise and enters it."

37. Does the Believer Experience the Pangs of Death?

Death is a terrifying moment — both the believer and the disbeliever fear it and dislike it. Every person must pass through it without escape. The extraction of the soul is a wrenching, painful experience, and every human being tastes it — whether believer or disbeliever. The believer experiences only a little of the pain of death. As for the disbeliever, the extraction of the soul is the first of his punishment.

Al-Bukhari reports that Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) would say: "Among the blessings of Allah upon me is that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) died in my house, on my day, between my neck and chest, and that Allah gathered between my saliva and his at the time of his death..." She described his final moments, including his saying: "There is no god but Allah — indeed, death has its pangs." Then he stretched his hand upward and said: "In the highest company" — until he passed away and his hand fell.

38. The Moment of Death Is the Moment of Announcement of the Final Result

The moment of death for every servant of Allah is the stage of announcement of the final result. The believer receives the glad tidings of Paradise, and the disbeliever receives the tidings of the Fire. Allah says: "Indeed, those who have said, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and then remained on a right course — the angels will descend upon them (at death), saying, 'Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised. We were your allies in worldly life and in the Hereafter. And you will have therein whatever your souls desire, and you will have therein whatever you request.'" (Fussilat: 30-32)

39. The Final Moments in the Life of the Believer and the Disbeliever

The Prophet (peace be upon him) described these final moments in the life of the believer and the disbeliever, saying: "When the believing servant is about to depart from this world and move toward the Hereafter, angels descend from heaven with white faces, as if their faces were the sun, with them shrouds and perfume from Paradise. They sit from him at a distance as far as the eye can see. Then the angel of death comes and sits by his head and says: 'O pure soul, come out to forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure.' It flows out like a drop flows from the mouth of a water skin. When they take it, they don't leave it in their hands for even the blink of an eye — they place it in that shroud and that perfume, and it emerges with the most beautiful fragrance of musk found on the face of the earth. They ascend with it, and they do not pass by any gathering of angels without them saying, 'What is this pure soul?' And they say: 'So-and-so, son of so-and-so' — by the best names they used to call him in the world — until they reach the lowest heaven and ask for it to be opened. It is opened for him, and he is accompanied from every heaven by those nearest to the next heaven, until he reaches the seventh heaven. Allah says: 'Write the book of My servant in the highest place, and return My servant to the earth, for from it I created them, into it I return them, and from it I will bring them out another time.'"

40. Some Sinful Believers Are Punished in Their Graves for Minor and Major Sins

Sinful believers may be punished in their graves for both minor and major sins. Among them is one punished for tale-bearing, one punished for not being careful to cleanse himself of urine, and one punished for a debt he owed that he did not repay. In the Musnad of Ahmad from Jabir ibn Abdullah Al-Ansari: "A man died and we washed him, shrouded him, and perfumed him. Then we brought him to the Messenger of Allah to pray over him. We said 'Will you pray over him?' He stepped forward a few steps then said: 'Does he have a debt?' We said: 'Two dinars.' He turned away. Abu Qatada took on the debt. The Prophet prayed over him. Then the Prophet asked the next day: 'What did he do with the two dinars?' Abu Qatada said: 'He only died yesterday.' He returned to him the following day and said: 'I have paid them.' The Messenger of Allah said: 'Now his skin has cooled.'"

His saying "Now his skin has cooled" indicates that he was being punished in the grave until the debt was paid.

41. The Grave — Even Without Punishment — Is a Torment

Even without punishment, the grave is terrifying. It is solitude, loneliness, darkness, and constriction. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "These graves are filled with darkness for their inhabitants, and Allah illuminates them through my prayer over them."

Every believer will be greeted in the grave with a squeezing and pressing. The Prophet said about Sa'd ibn Mu'adh — whose death caused the Throne to tremble, whose grave was attended by seventy thousand angels — "He was squeezed once, then it was relieved." (Reported by An-Nasa'i, authenticated by Al-Albani)

42. The Standing and Gathering — A Heavy, Long, Grim, and Oppressive Day!

What comes after the grave is greater than it — it is the Resurrection and the Gathering. It is the heavy, long, grim, and oppressive Day! It is one day — but it is fifty thousand years in length, as measured by the days of this world. A day whose sun does not set until fifty thousand years have passed. A day on which people stand for the Lord of all worlds, with sweat reaching up to their earlobes — some up to their ankles, some up to their knees, some up to their chests, some being silenced by their sweat, and some drowning in their sweat.

Allah has warned all of His servants of it: "O mankind, fear your Lord. Indeed, the convulsion of the Hour is a terrible thing. On the Day you see it every nursing mother will be distracted from that infant she was nursing, and every pregnant woman will abort her pregnancy, and you will see the people intoxicated while they are not intoxicated; but the punishment of Allah is severe." (Al-Hajj: 1-2)

43. The Withholders of Zakah Are Punished for Fifty Thousand Years

Among the people of faith whose sins Allah has not willed to forgive — they are punished in the land of the gathering for these sins for fifty thousand years until Allah judges between all creatures. Among them: the withholder of Zakah. In the authentic hadith: "There is no owner of treasure who does not pay what is due on it, except that it will be made into plates heated in the fire of Hell, and his forehead, side, and back will be branded with it until Allah judges between His servants on a day whose measure is fifty thousand years of what you count." (Reported by Imam Ahmad)

In Sahih Muslim: "There is no owner of gold or silver who does not pay what is due on it, except that on the Day of Resurrection plates of fire will be prepared for him, heated in the fire of Hell, and his side, forehead, and back will be branded with it. Every time they cool, they will be returned to him, on a day whose measure is fifty thousand years, until judgment is passed between servants and he sees his path either to Paradise or to the Fire."

44. Believers in the Shade of Allah on the Day of Resurrection

Among the people of faith are those who will be in the shade of Allah — whom Allah has especially honored for their great deeds. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Seven will be shaded by Allah in His shade on the day when there is no shade but His: a just ruler; a youth who grew up in worship of Allah; a man whose heart is attached to the mosques; two men who loved each other for Allah's sake, meeting upon it and parting upon it; a man who is invited by a woman of beauty and position, and says 'I fear Allah'; a man who gives charity so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand spends; and a man who remembers Allah in private and his eyes fill with tears." (Agreed upon)

45. Crossing the Bridge (Sirat) Is the Greatest Trial for the People of Faith

The penultimate stage of this Day is the most difficult and hardest — it is the crossing over Hell from the land of gathering to another bridge before Paradise. It is crossing over the Fire in its entirety. And how vast is this Fire! If we brought it close to understanding, we would say it is like crossing the sun — but the sun is a small planet within the Fire!

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The bridge will be placed across Hellfire, and I and my ummah will be the first to cross it. On that day none will speak except the Messengers, and the supplication of the Messengers will be: 'O Allah, grant safety! O Allah, grant safety!' In Hellfire there will be hooks like the thorns of the Sa'dan plant — have you seen the Sa'dan?" They said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah." He said: "They are like the thorns of the Sa'dan — though no one knows how great they are except Allah. They will catch people according to their deeds — some believers will escape by their deeds, and some will be torn to pieces and then saved." (Reported by Muslim)

46. Who Are Those Detained by the Quran?

Those detained by the Quran are many — they are those whom Allah has declared to be permanently in the Fire. First among them are the disbelievers and polytheists. Allah says: "Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills." (An-Nisa: 116)

Among those declared permanently in the Fire by the Quran: the intentional killer who did not repent. Allah says: "And whoever kills a believer intentionally — his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah has become angry with him and has cursed him and has prepared for him a great punishment." (An-Nisa: 93)

And the one who consumes usury and dies without repenting from it. Allah says: "Those who consume interest cannot stand on the Day of Resurrection except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity. That is because they say, 'Trade is just like interest.' But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden interest. So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with Allah. But whoever returns to dealing in interest or usury — those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein." (Al-Baqarah: 275)

47. Were the Believers to Reckon the Possibility of Falling from the Bridge?

Look, O servant of Allah — you who read or hear these words — and measure this day at its true weight. For it is written upon every servant of Allah that he will not enter Paradise except by crossing over the Fire on the bridge. Allah says: "And there is none of you except he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed. Then We will save those who feared Allah and leave the wrongdoers within it, on their knees." (Maryam: 71-72)

The bridge is what you know — a very, very, very long bridge over Hellfire. On the day the bridge is placed over Hell, faithfulness (amanah) will stand on one side and kinship (rahim) will stand on the other — signaling and announcing that whoever fulfilled his trusts and maintained family ties will be saved and reach Paradise. But whoever betrayed his trust or severed kinship ties — his foot will betray him, he will fall, and be cut off from reaching Paradise!

48. One Moment in the Fire Makes the Tormented Forget Every Pleasure He Experienced Before

One single moment in the Fire — even a single immersion — will make you forget every pleasure you enjoyed on earth. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The most prosperous person of worldly life among the people of the Fire will be brought on the Day of Resurrection and dipped into Hell once. Then it will be said to him: 'O son of Adam, did you ever see any good? Did any pleasure ever pass you?' He will say: 'No, by Allah, O Lord.' And the most miserable person of worldly life among the people of Paradise will be brought and dipped into Paradise once. Then it will be said to him: 'O son of Adam, did you ever see any misery? Did any hardship ever pass you?' He will say: 'No, by Allah, O Lord. No misery ever passed me and I never saw hardship.'"

49. "And There Will Appear to Them from Allah What They Had Not Expected!"

To those who flatter themselves and look at their sins as though they were a fly that landed on one's nose and could be dismissed with a wave of the hand — have you heard the Prophet's words: "I stood at the gate of the Fire and the majority of those who entered it were women!" (Reported by Muslim). And his words: "O women, give charity, for I have been shown that you are the majority of the people of the Fire." They asked: "Why, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: "You curse excessively and are ungrateful to your husbands..."

50. The Final Stage (The Ultimate Purification)

After that arduous and difficult stage — the crossing of the bridge (Sirat) and the salvation of those who are saved from the Fire among the sinful believers — what remains is the settling of accounts between believers and the purification of what remains of grievances between them. Al-Bukhari reports that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "The believers will be saved from the Fire and will be held on a bridge between Paradise and the Fire. They will settle scores between themselves for

injustices committed between them in the world. When they have been purified and cleansed, they will be permitted to enter Paradise. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad — each one of them will know his dwelling in Paradise better than he knew his dwelling in this world."

51. Finally — Paradise Opens Its Gates: The Poor Enter First, the Wealthy Are Delayed!

After these long stages and great obstacles, the believers will stand at the gates of Paradise — which have not yet opened! And they will not open until the one whom Allah has raised to the highest station in this world and the next arrives — the one He has made the master of all people. And will the believers enter Paradise before their master and leader arrives? The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad ibn Abdullah — the most honored of all servants before Allah — will come and be the first to knock at the gate of Paradise while the people watch and the believers wait. Ridwan, its guardian, will call from within: "By you I was commanded — I will not open for anyone before you." (Reported by Muslim)

Paradise will open its eight gates — the distance between the two panels of a single gate being as between Makkah and Hajar (Bahrain). Each gate has a specific name, named after a type of worship: the gate of prayer, the gate of Zakah, the gate of Ar-Rayyan (the gate of fasting), the gate of jihad, and the gate of honoring parents.

The poor will enter first! The wealthy believers will be detained — half a day — five hundred years — as compensation for a period of deprivation in this world. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I stood at the gate of Paradise and the majority of those who entered it were the poor. The people of wealth were detained — except that the people of the Fire had been ordered to the Fire. And I stood at the gate of the Fire and the majority of those who entered it were women." (Reported by Ahmad and Al-Bukhari)

52. The Previous False Sense of Security Was Deception

After all this — I looked at my situation and found that I had lived a long period of my life deluded. The false security I used to feel was self-deception! And what uncovered this truth for me was a group of things that came together, revealing to the eye what had been veiled — even though in reality it had never been truly veiled! For the Quran had spoken it extensively, and the Prophet had preached it from his pulpit for a long time. When the Prophet saw the Fire with his own eyes, he said: "If you knew what I know, you would laugh little and weep much!" (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

He (peace be upon him), when he heard a companion utter words of reassurance and certainty about Paradise for someone whose righteousness was known, would say: "By Allah, I do not know — and I am the Messenger of Allah — what will be done with me!" (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

53. A Call, An Appeal, and A Plea to My Muslim Brothers

My brothers and beloved Muslims:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever has wronged his brother — whether in honor or wealth — let him seek his forgiveness today, before a Day when there will be neither dinar nor dirham. If he has good deeds, they will be taken in proportion to his injustice. And if he has no good deeds, the bad deeds of his victim will be placed upon him." (Reported by Al-Bukhari)

I have taken a quick look back at my record and found among the rights and debts I owe to my Muslim brothers what I am unable to fully repay — a long chain of injustices! I am returning from them in this world before the Hereafter, and I call upon everyone who has a grievance against me to pardon me, or to demand it of me now. May Allah reward them if they hasten their demand here in this world — for by doing so, they are truly the best of brothers and friends. And I ask every compassionate, caring brother — by Allah — not to delay his demand until the Day of Resurrection.

O Allah, I ask You by Your most beautiful Names and Your loftiest Attributes, and by Your mercy which encompasses all things — I ask You, as You are Allah, Lord of all worlds, the Kind, the Merciful, the Forgiving, the Loving, the Possessor of the Noble Throne — to overlook my transgressions, to forgive me my sins, to reward every believer who treated me well with goodness from You, and to forgive all who wronged me or committed any injustice against me.

O Allah, accept my deeds — indeed, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. My Lord, inspire me to be grateful for Your blessings upon me and upon my parents, to do righteous deeds that please You, and to set right my descendants. Indeed, I have repented to You, and I am among the Muslims.